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INFORMATION ON TOPICAL SPIRONOLACTONE FOR TREATING FEMALE PATTERN HAIR LOSS

What is Spironolactone?

- Spironolactone is an oral medication that blocks the effects of hormones called 'androgens.'
- The oral medication is used to treat hair loss but also used to treat acne, and excessive hair growth on the face.
- Topical spironolactone may also be used in treating acne, hair loss and seborrhea. A 5 % cream is widely used in Europe.

How is Topical Spironolactone prescribed?

- Dr Donovan will advise on spironolactone dosing.
- A 2 %, 3 % or 5 % solution/cream is typically used. Rarely the active metabolite of spironolactone (canrenone) is used.
- The 2 % or 3 % solution is made up by a compounding pharmacy and contains 50% alcohol, 30 % propylene glycol and 20 % water.
- A lotion may be made with 60 % ethanol, 10 % propylene glycol, 20 % water and 10 % aloe vera
- A pharmacist may have other additives to control the odour (it sometimes has an odour)
- The medication may be stored cool, but check with the pharmacist.

Can I use Topical Spironolactone with other medications I use?

- Dr. Donovan will not typically prescribe topical spironolactone to any patient using these medications:
 - ACE-inhibitors, angiotensin receptor inhibitors, potassium pills, digoxin, lithium, NSAIDS and thiazide diuretics

Who should not use Topical Spironolactone?

- Patients with kidney problems
- Patients with high potassium levels in the blood
- Patients who are pregnant or wish to become pregnant in the very near future (women must not get pregnant on this medication)
- Patients who are breast feeding
- Patients who have abnormal uterine bleeding
- Patients with a family history or personal history of breast, ovarian or uterine cancer
- Patients with a history of gastrointestinal bleeding (GI bleeding) or gastric ulcers
- Patients using ACE-inhibitors, angiotensin receptor inhibitors, potassium pills, digoxin, lithium, NSAIDS and thiazide diuretics
- Patients with depression or anxiety

What side effects are possible with Topical Spironolactone?

- Menstrual irregularities (being on the birth control pill may help make periods regular). The most common side effect of spironolactone is irregular periods and this occurs in 80 % of users.
- Breast tenderness and breast enlargement
- Rarely patients may feel dizzy when you stand up quickly
- High potassium in the blood (rare in healthy women)
- Fatigue, trouble concentrating
- Depression, anxiety
- Brain fog
- Weight gain
- Decreased libido (decreased sex drive)
- Hair shedding (rare)
- GI upset: Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, ulcers and bleeding are very rare
- Teratogenicity – This means that it may cause abnormalities in a developing fetus (baby) if a woman gets pregnant while on this medication. Women can have healthy babies once they stop this medication but must not get pregnant while on this medication.

What side effects should prompt me to STOP Spironolactone and get medical advice?

- Stop taking Spironolactone and get medical help if you develop a rash, hives, shortness of breath, swelling in the lips or feel unwell
- Stop if you have any concerns at all and advise our office.
- Stop if you develop breast enlargement, bumps or lumps in the breast or discharge.

What tests should I have when I am on this medication?

- Your blood pressure may need to be monitored while you are on this medication. Dr. Donovan will advise if this is important for you or not.
- You may be advised to get blood work while on this medication.

Please note that years ago, routine testing for potassium levels was common for all patients using spironolactone. Studies have now shown that this is not necessary. The chance of most women developing high potassium levels in the blood is not increased by being on Spironolactone. Physicians may not be aware of this new research and we understand if patients are therefore advised by other physicians “to get a blood test for potassium.” Only if a patient were to develop muscle pain or skipped heart beats would we advise getting a potassium level at that time.

